

Samuel H. Moffett

THE FREEDOM THAT LASTS (2)
JOHN: 8: 36

Jesus was talking to some of his Jewish followers one day in the Roman colony of Judaea. He told them, "...if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." I want to speak briefly about freedom, freedom in Jesus Christ. Then I want to ask a question: If Jesus Christ has made you free, what are you free for?

Let me begin with a memory from my boyhood in Korea which was then a Japanese colony. My memory goes back even farther than 57 years and the great victory we celebrate here today: independence for Korea as World War II ended on August 15, 1945. Two of my brothers fought in the Pacific in that war. But I remember another Independence Day 26 years earlier, March 1, 1919 (the Samil Undong). One of the advantages of being 86 years old is that I can remember things that you can only read about. The Samil Undong was probably the largest non-violent protest of a captive colony against its oppressors until Gandhi, in 1947.

I was three years old in my home in Pyengyang. My brother and I were supposed to be taking a nap. Suddenly there was a commotion in the house, and the door to our bedroom was thrown open, and there were soldiers coming in, with fixed bayonets, and my father looking greatly disturbed just behind them. They were searching for students who had taken part in the demonstrations, students who would be beaten and taken off to jail. But we didn't know that. All I knew was that all day we had been hearing people shouting: Taehan tongnip mansei [Long live a free Korea]. So when the door opened, and we saw all the people coming in, we said what we had been hearing people say that day, "Mansei"---the forbidden word-- and father's face turned pale. What would the soldiers do? But the soldiers blinked in astonishment, and even the Japanese have a sense of humor. They began to laugh uneasily and move away. The sight of two little blonde kids smiling and shouting in Korean somehow seemed incongruous and almost funny to them. And my father

relaxed.

But those were no days for humor or laughing. What the soldiers did not know was that in a little shed in our lower yard, Korean Christians had secretly printed copies of the Declaration of Independence which were being distributed that day all over town. The movement spread like wildfire. The army was called in. Hundreds were executed. Thousands were tortured. Korea had lost its emperor, its flag, its possessions, and was even losing its language as the conquerors began to force the people to take Japanese names, and the schools to teach in Japanese. They had lost their freedom.

But not all Koreans. Not all had lost their freedom. Some Koreans had found a freedom no one could take away. When the idea of the great protest was first launched, it was planned as a violent uprising, and the leaders looked for well-known men who would be willing to sign a public "Declaration of Independence" to touch off the revolution. But not many of Korea's leaders were willing to sign such a dangerous document. Signing it would be like signing their own death warrants, they thought. So they turned to the Christians; pastors and well-known laymen. And the Christians said, "Yes, we will sign gladly. We love our country. But we cannot join a campaign of violence. So the plans were changed, the Christians signed, the protest was peaceful, and the violence and brutality when it came, as it did, was all on the side of the conquerors.

The conquerors were the Japanese, but Korea's Christians, to use a Pauline phrase from the Book of Romans, were "more than conquerors" (Rom. 8:37). At that time only about 2% of the country was Christian, but of the men with the courage finally to sign their names to that Korean Declaration of Independence, 50%, half, were Christians. They were thrown into jail. But the country has never been the same since. It was a turning point, also, in the history of the Christian church in Korea. Most of the Korean people, ever since the days of the great 19th century persecutions, had been a little suspicious of Christianity as being a foreign

religion. The Samil Undong showed that Christians were people who were not afraid to die for their country. Christians were people who loved their country, and were not afraid to stand up for its freedom. They were not afraid to put their names on the line for justice, and to ask that it all be done in peace.

Why? Was it simply patriotism? That was part of it, of course. But if the impulse was only love of country, why did the signers include such a high proportion of Christians? Demographics would have suggested 97% non-Christian patriots to 3% Christians, not a surprising 50% Christian. Why were the Christians so disproportionately brave? Korea's Christians will tell you that the answer is in our text. "...if the Son has made you free, you will be free indeed." Those Christians had never been slaves, not even when treated like slaves. They had never been conquered; even when taken captive. Theirs was a freedom that cannot be taken away. And when men and women are free with the freedom that no one can take from them, in that freedom they find the strength and the courage and the hope to stand for all the lesser freedoms of life on this earth (lesser but no less precious): justice for the oppressed, liberty for the captives, respect for the despised and weak and all who are afraid. "If Jesus has made you free, you are free indeed." That is the only freedom that lasts! We have God's own word for that.

But what will we do with our freedom? That is the question with which I want to close this message. Korea was freed in 1945. But not yet "free indeed". Another war cut the little peninsula in two, north and south. One of my brothers fought in that war too. And North Korea is still not free. Only South Korea is free, but how will free Koreans, here in America as well as back in Korea, use that freedom? History tells us how frequently a people freed from an outside aggressor, begin to fight among themselves. Even Christians.

But if God is for freedom, as Jesus tells us in our text, is that what Christians will do--divide, quarrel and fight each other? God forbid.

Actually you have already begun to answer that question. After the failed Independence Movement of 1919, Korea's Christians discovered the importance of those lesser freedoms I mentioned-- justice for the oppressed, relief for the poor, healing for the sick. Even under the pressure of Japanese occupation they found ways to obey their Lord, for Jesus had said, "If God so loved you, you also ought to love one another. (I John 4:12). But there is more than loving your neighbor in his commands. If you love me, keep my commandments. And his last great command was this: Go into all the world and preach the good news, the gospel" (Mark 16:15). And Koreans today are already answering that "great commission".

South Korea has become one of the most enthusiastically missionary countries in the world. It is not a large country, but it is sending out across the world today 10,000 Korean missionaries. Our Presbyterian Church USA has less than 400 career foreign missionaries.

But even 10,000 Korean missionaries is not enough. Not even enough for the continent of Asia, its own neighbors. Jesus was born in Asia, but Asia is the least Christian continent in the world, statistically speaking. Latin America is 90% Christian (these figures have a large margin of error); Europe is 77% Christian; North America 70%; Africa 48%--but Asia is only 7% Christian.

Asia is the largest continent in the world, with more than 60 % of all the world's people, 3 billion. Here in North America we have only 5%, less than 300 million. But in America 77 in every 100 claim to be Christian; in Asia, only 7 in every 100. Asia is the greatest evangelistic challenge in the world.

One of the most significant statistics about Asia I have seen is one I read about 30 years ago. In the next twenty years, an economist said, one billion Asians will pass through the age of 18. In other words, today's 8-year-old will be 28 years old then. But in those same 20 years another billion young people in Asia will have passed their 18th birthday.

Now that may not sound alarming. But think about it. In

the next 20 years one billion young Asians will enter the most productive period of their lives. To the economist who reported this, it meant that Asia will add another billion young people to; the world's most industrially active age group in only 20 years. And one billion people, he said, is about ten times the entire present manufacturing force of North America, Japan, and Western Europe combined. That means that whether gradually or quickly "manufacturing will go east", he said, until eventually Asia will become the industrial center of the world. (Norman McRae, The Economist, London, May 7, 1977, p. 42).

But then he had a second thought. What will happen to the future of the world if those same one billion Asian youths don't turn into workers. What if they can't get jobs? Then, he said, we face the terrifying possibility that they will follow what he called the other "three modern roads to hell": TERRORISM, WAR, OR OVERPOPULATION. Suppose, he said, that all those young people turning 18 every year simply become parents at the rate their fathers and mothers did. Then there will be no more room on earth for so many people, and the earth will indeed be like a living hell.

To me, however, and I hope to you, the thought of one billion young people more in Asia in the next 20 years means much more than that economist was thinking of. To me it means that during the next 20 years one billion young people will be passing through the most evangelistically reachable years of their lives. A billion young Asian to be reached for Jesus Christ in the years when they might be most open to his call. That is not hell. It is a challenge, a part of the greatest challenge that is facing the Church of Jesus Christ today.

"If you love me, love your neighbor," Jesus said. "I am the way and the truth and the life, and no one comes to the Father but by me", Jesus said. "If I make you free, you will be free indeed," Jesus said. HE HAS SET YOU FREE. FOR WHAT? GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD AND PREACH THE GOOD NEWS. That is what we are freed for. And don't forget Asia. --Samuel Hugh Moffett

Final

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Jesus was talking to some of his Jewish followers one day in the Roman colony of Judaea. He told them, "...if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed."

I'm not sure that quoting a Bible verse like that back in 1919 in the Japanese colony of Korea, regardless of some parallels in the situation, would have meant very much to most Koreans. In 1919 there were less than 300,000 Korean Christians among some 10 million non-Christians. But in fact that unfamiliar book, the Bible, was soon to change the history of the whole nation, and not least among the factors that made the change were these words of Jesus from the Gospel of John: "...if the Son [Jesus was speaking of himself]--if I "make you free, you will be free indeed."

Nevertheless, in 1919 those words must have sounded like empty dreams and wishful thinking in conquered and colonized Korea. I remember Korea then, Korea under Japanese occupation. In fact I remember the March 1, 1919 Independence Movement, probably the largest, non-violent demonstration and uprising of a captive nation in the history of the world up to that time.

That is the earliest memory of my life. I was three years old. My brother and I were supposed to be taking a nap. Suddenly there was a commotion in the house, and the door to our bedroom was thrown open, and there were soldiers with fixed bayonets and my father greatly disturbed looking through the door just behind them. We learned later that they were looking for students who had taken part in the demonstrations, students who would be beaten and taken off to jail. But I didn't know that. All I knew was that all day we had been hearing the shouting: Taehan tongnip mansei [Long live a free Korea]. So when the door opened, and we saw all the soldiers, we happily welcomed them with what we had heard the people shouting: "Tongnip mansei", the forbidden words, and my father's face paled. What would the soldiers do? But the soldiers

blinked, and began to laugh and went away. The sight of two little blonde kids shouting Korean somehow touched their sense of humor.

But of those were no days for laughing. What the soldiers did not know was that in a little shed in our lower yard, Korean Christians had secretly printed the copies of the Declaration of Independence which were being distributed that day all over town. The movement spread like wildfire. The army was called in. Hundreds were executed. Thousands were tortured. Korea had lost its emperor, its flag, its possessions, and was even losing its language as the conquerors began to force the people to take Japanese names, and the schools to teach in Japanese. They had lost their freedom.

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They were thrown into jail. But the country has never been the same since. Christians, the people discovered, were people who were not afraid; Christians were people who loved their country, and were not afraid to stand up for its freedom, and to put their names on the line for justice, and to ask that it all be done in peace.

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course. But then, why was the percentage of signers so overwhelmingly Christian? Demographics would have suggested 97% non-Christian patriots to 3% Christians, not a surprising 50% Christian. Why were the Christians so disproportionately brave?

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--Samuel Hugh Moffett
Princeton, 3/4/93

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Slowly the weary, dispirited creatures wound their way into the room, and, with crouching reluctance, presented their baskets to be weighed.

Legree noted on a slate, on the side of which was pasted a list of names, the amount.

Tom's basket was weighed and approved; and he looked, with an anxious glance, for the success of the woman he had befriended.

Tottering with weakness, she came forward, and delivered her basket. It was of full weight, as Legree well perceived; but, affecting anger, he said,—

"What, you lazy beast! short again! stand aside, you'll catch it, pretty soon!"

The woman gave a groan of utter despair, and sat down on a board.

The person who had been called Misse Cassy now came forward, and, with a haughty, negligent air, delivered her basket. As she delivered it, Legree looked in her eyes with a sneering yet inquiring glance.

She fixed her black eyes steadily on him, her lips moved slightly, and she said something in French. What it was, no one knew; but Legree's face became perfectly demoniacal in its expression, as she spoke; he half raised his hand, as if to strike,—a gesture which she regarded with fierce disdain, as she turned and walked away.

"And now," said Legree, "come here, you Tom. You see, I telled ye I didn't buy ye jest for the common work; I mean to promote ye, and make a driver of ye; and to-night ye may jest as well begin to get yer hand in. Now, ye jest take this yer gal and flog her; ye've seen enough on't to know how."

"I beg Mas'r's pardon," said Tom; "hopes Mas'r won't set me at that. It's what I an't used to,—never did,—and can't do, no way possible."

"Ye'll larn a pretty smart chance of things ye never did know, before I've done with ye!" said Legree, taking up a cowhide, and striking Tom a heavy blow across the cheek, and following up the infliction by a shower of blows.

"There!" he said, as he stopped to rest; "now will ye tell me ye can't do it?"

"Yes, Mas'r," said Tom, putting up his hand, to wipe the blood, that trickled down his face. "I'm willin' to work night and day, and work while there's life and breath in me; but this yer thing I can't feel it right to do;—and, Mas'r, I *never* shall do it,—*never!*"

Tom had a remarkably smooth, soft voice, and a habitually respectful manner, that had given Legree an idea that he would be cowardly, and easily subdued. When he spoke these last words, a thrill of amazement went through every one; the poor woman clasped her hands, and said, "O Lord!" and every one involuntarily looked at each other and drew in their breath, as if to prepare for the storm that was about to burst.

Legree looked stupetied and confounded; but at last burst forth,—

"What! ye blasted black beast! tell *me* ye don't think it *right* to do what I tell ye! What have any of you cussed cattle to do with thinking what's right? I'll put a stop to it! Why, what do ye think ye are? May be ye think ye'r a gentleman, master Tom, to be a telling your master what's right, and what an't! So you pretend it's wrong to flog the gal!"

"I think so, Mas'r," said Tom; "the poor crittur's sick and feeble; 'twould be downright cruel, and it's what I never will do, nor begin to. Mas'r, if you mean to kill me, kill me; but, as to my raising my hand again any one here, I never shall,—I'll die first!"

Tom spoke in a mild voice, but with a decision that could not be mistaken. Legree shook with anger; his greenish eyes glared fiercely, and his very whiskers seemed to curl with passion; but, like some ferocious beast, that plays with its victim before he devours it, he kept back his strong impulse to proceed to immediate violence, and broke out into bitter raillery.

"Well, here's a pious dog, at last, let down among us sinners!—a saint, a gentleman, and no less, to talk to us sinners about our sins! Powerful holy crittur, he must be! Here, you rascal, you make believe to be so pious,—didn't you never hear, out of yer Bible, 'Servants, obey yer masters'? An't I yer master? Didn't I pay down twelve hundred dollars, cash, for all there is inside yer old cussed black shell? An't yer mine, now, body and soul?" he said, giving Tom a violent kick with his heavy boot; "tell me!"

In the very depth of physical suffering, bowed by brutal oppression, this question shot a gleam of joy and triumph through Tom's soul. He suddenly stretched himself up, and, looking earnestly to heaven, while the tears and blood that flowed down his face mingled, he exclaimed,—

"No! no! no! my soul an't yours, Mas'r! You haven't bought it,—ye can't buy it! It's been bought and paid for, by one that is able to keep it;—no matter, no matter, you can't harm me!"

"I can't!" said Legree, with a sneer; "we'll see,—we'll see! Here, Sambo, Quimbo, give this dog such a breakin' in as he won't get over, this month!"

The two gigantic negroes that now laid hold of Tom, with fiendish exultation in their faces, might have formed no unapt personification of the powers of darkness. The poor woman screamed with apprehension, and all rose, as by a general impulse, while they dragged him unresisting from the place.*